

Underneath the Mountain Grow Ferns of Ice

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Summary: Once upon a time, a prince died to save his sister. The Man in the Moon enchants the prince, sealing him in healing ice, and commanding a hero to rescue him in ten years' time. Hiccup is pretty sure they should have chosen someone else.

Underneath the Mountain Grow Ferns of Ice

"Of course it's on the top of the mountain," Hiccup grumbles, glaring at the peak capped in snow and draped in clouds. "Because it makes fucking sense to leave a frozen, enchanted prince at the top of a fucking mountain, incased in fucking ice and relying on everyone else to fucking save his ass." The mountain is by far the tallest around, so high that it is said that the tip of it pierces into the realms of the gods themselves. Within the mountain lurks gold and gems beyond compare, but no one wishes to risk anger the spirits of the mountain enough to mine them. It is an untouched relic of a wilder world, and Hiccup has been sent to conquer it and steal its treasure â€" the lost prince.

Toothless paws at his leg, silently begging for more of the fish that Hiccup has stuffed into the rucksack on his back. Hiccup transfers his hateful glower towards the dragon, irritation as obvious as the Man in the Moon. "You're absolutely no help at all," he tells the dragon sourly.

Toothless yawns. His breath reeks of fish intestines â€" the rotten kind that their village always has on hand for long winters. Hiccup has long become accustomed to it, and so does not react beyond shoving his dragon's face away from his leg with a roll of his forest green eyes.

"Well, come on then," he mutters, starting off towards the towering mountain, his back hunched. "The precious prince isn't going to rescue himself."

* * *

><p>Once upon a time, there was a prince and a princess. The classic things required in fairy tales can be said of them " the prince was handsome, the princess beautiful, both good and sweet and generous. The things to be expected of rulers " although the legends told of them leave out the princess's horrendous sweet tooth and her need to be at the center of attention, along with the prince's tendency towards mischief and disregard of rules.<p>

Sister and brother, most looked to the prince's cheerfulness and protectiveness of his younger sister as a sign of the wonderful things he would bring upon the kingdom. Even as a youth, his praises were sung in the streets, the ladies of the kingdom sighing over his image.

But these are not the important pieces of the tale.

The prince drowned, once upon a time. Both the prince and princess were fond of ice skating. Near the palace, a lake shimmered, set like a diamond into the emerald of the summer landscape. In the winter, it was a cloudy opal, surrounded by pearls. Trees bowed their head in respect to the majesty of such a lake, lorded over by kind water gods who blessed the people with fish and fresh, cool water, sweeter than anything the palace cooks could create.

And once upon a time, the prince and princess went to the lake, their skates upon their backs. And once upon a time, the ice was not as thick as they expected, and cracks spiraled out like dissent, right under the feet of the nine year old princess.

Jamesha.

Everyone called her Jamie, but it had been her brother who had first named her that.

She promised to be a legendary beauty and had a smile that could lift the hearts of all who looked upon her. She was generous with her money and kind towards those who had less than her, often sponsoring village children so they were able to attend school. She was already accomplished in embroidery and no horseman could match her skill, and she was a jewel in an already great kingdom.

The prince saw none of that. He saw his nine year old sister with the chip on her tooth from when she tumbled down the stairs, who liked to braid his hair when he would let her. The sister that screamed sometimes, loud and furiously enough to call down the wrath of the gods themselves, but was almost always so sweet that she could charm even the lords of the underworld.

His sister, who was nine years old and about to die.

And so he pushed her away from where the ice was shattering apart. The water sucked him down like he was oxygen to a drowning man, and the prince was pulled underneath, into the frozen waters of a winter lake.

Once upon a time, the prince died. But not really, for the Man in the Moon, the greatest of all the gods, saw his brave act, and saw his reasons for trading his life for his sister's. The Man in the Moon

lifted the frozen body and breathed life back into frozen lungs, but the boy was too far gone for such an action to stick, for the air to return to his body and the beat to his heart.

Once upon a time, the Man in the Moon took the faded prince to the greatest of all the mountains, the one that pierced even the realm of the gods, and interred him in healing ice. He sent a message to the king and queen, rained it down upon all those in the land " that the prince was alive, but not yet able to survive on his own. In ten years time, someone would need to journey to the mountain that pierced the realm of the gods, and free him from his healing ice.

And once upon a time, the bravest warrior in all the land had a son. Like all good fairy tale fathers, this one sent his son out to prove his worth in the chosen mission of rescuing the prince from the mountain.

Hiccup is pretty sure they should have picked someone else.

* * *

><p>On the first day, he and Toothless scramble over rocks, swing around dead, dried trees. To pass the time, it becomes a game " tag, dragon chasing boy and boy chasing dragon up the barren slopes where nothing has grown since the prince was interred in his saving prison. They sleep underneath the stars, with the Man in the Moon smiling down upon them and the stars dancing with excitement.<p>

Toothless snores, his chest a rumble that scares off any creatures that would think of attacking them. When he exhales, tiny flickers of rich purple fire sparks about his nose. He dreams of fish and flying to the clouds.

Hiccup does not sleep until the hour is so late that even the Man in the Moon is yawning. He watches the stars, watch them sway through their nightly ball, and wonders about the prince. Since he was but a child, his father has been doing his best to prepare Hiccup for what Stoick felt to be his son's true mission in life. Even his dragon, his best friend, his Toothless, is suppose to be a means to the end of saving the prince. Even though the mountain makes the winds unpredictable and flying dangerous, a dragon is always a blessing to have in the face of danger.

Hiccup is no hero. The prince will laugh in his face when he sees his supposed rescuer, like the villagers do when Hiccup attempts to train among them. A hundred people are said to have died on the suicidal mission of saving the frozen prince, and Hiccup believes deep down in his bones that he will be the hundred and first one to perish on this bare mountain.

And yet, he wants to be the one to save the prince. There is glory involved, sure, and a reward " as the son of a mercenary, Hiccup knows the value of rewards. But there is more to it than that. Hiccup thinks he can understand the isolation, the fear, that the prince must be experiencing " asleep or not, that kind of feeling sinks right down into the bones and never lets go. He has grown up on tales of the prince, and a part of him wants to be included in those stories.

So Hiccup grinds his teeth, closes his eyes, and wills himself to sleep.

* * *

><p>They are running low in water by the third day, but a timely snowfall saves them from their thirst. The snow piles up around them, heaps and heaps that glitter in the weak sunlight, and yet the path stays clear enough for them to pick out the way to the top.<p>

Caves and overhangs appear just when Hiccup decides they have made enough progress for the day. Unusual, on such a mountain that lacks so little covering from the elements â€" no trees, no bushes, hardly any loose pebbles, and yet there is always shelter for them.

Birds and small rodents always manage to stumble their way into Hiccup's amateurish traps, so they are not lacking for food â€" not even Toothless, who has always been notoriously difficult to feed.

Hiccup wonders if it would be too much to hope that someone is looking out for him, but in his experience, such things never happen.

The view falls at their feet like a tablecloth, dropped on the floor. The sea gleams to the east, as blue as a dream. Hiccup almost thinks he can see his village of Berk, but perhaps he is only imagining the sight. To the west, fields of grain and hills full of trees roll lazily. And before him, in the south, sparkles the palace of the frozen prince â€" alabaster white under the light of the Man in the Moon; it rivals even the stars for beauty. The tops of the towers gleam with gold.

Hiccup pauses on the eighth day to watch the sunset, blood red and gentle. It casts a pink hue on the walls of the palace, dying the gold tips from yellow to deep, burnished copper. The fields in the east burn like they are on fire, the light rippling through them with childish glee. The sea is a plate of gleaming orange and scarlet flames.

"Do you think his family misses him?" he asks Toothless. Toothless snorts, coughs up sputtering indigo sparks, and stares attentively at the meat Hiccup is picking at.

"I think they do," Hiccup continues softly, staring down at his scarred, worn hands, covered in fresh scratches and lines of fresh blood. "His sister is older than him by now. He's frozen at seventeen, but she is already very nearly twenty. She is as pretty as a fairy tale now, and clever than most anyone around here." He smiles, sadly, feeling bitter on the behalf of someone he has never met. The amount of time the prince has lost, the things that have changedâ€" "I bet she misses him every day," he murmurs. They sit in silence, Hiccup studying the dirt wedged under his fingernails, and Toothless the meal his companion has made no move to devour. At last, Hiccup heaves a weary sigh, and hands over the rest of his meal to Toothless, scratching his chin before lying back and watching the stars take their places on their eternal ballroom floor.

* * *

><p>On the eleventh day, Hiccup catches a glimpse of an archway carved out of ebony swirled marble, set into the side of the dull gray stone of the mountain. Light, soft and gentle, pulses somewhere deep within, casting fluttering shadows that dip and soar on the walls. The breeze, pushed from onside the archway, carries the aroma of new snow – the sweet, cool scent of the days when the fires are lit and folk stay inside. Hiccup swallows hard, nerves grabbing hold of him and forcing a tremor into his hands that he cannot squash.<p>

Toothless eyes him curiously, then turns his gaze to the archway. He catches Hiccup's eye, and nods his head towards the dim passage. Hiccup inhales, trying to calm himself. "Alright," he says, with more confidence than he feels, "Let's go."

The corridor inside is smooth and even, wide enough for the dragon and the boy to walk side by side. The light shows them the path, leading them farther and farther into the heart of the mountain. They see no one, encounter none of the dangers often spoken of.

But then they turn a sharp corner, and there is a spirit, hanging in the air before them. He is so pale that he nearly fades into the light and the gray stones entirely, his hair like snow piled on top of frozen wheat. But his eyes are a shock – deep cerulean, tinged with icy blue, they are the loveliest thing Hiccup has ever seen. Hiccup catches a glimpse of them as he walks by, and shock makes him stumble back into the wall with a repressed shriek. "What the ever loving hell!"

"Oh god lord, little baby see a spider?" the spirit taunts, drifting down to crouch on the floor. His grin is crooked, curved more on one side than it is the other, and his eyes promise mischief. "You're a little young to be a rescuer. Most of the others have been, like, ancient. Wasn't hard at all to convince them to leave."

"What, so you're the terrible thing protecting the prince?" Hiccup snaps, hand resting on his small silver dagger. Toothless stands tense besides him, poised to attack. "A skinny little stick like you? Hah! You hardly look able to lift a grape without help." Hiccup is aware of his hypocrisy, but insults are second nature to those of Viking and mercenary descent, and he has few other weapons.

The spirit blinks. His grin slips from his lips, and his mouth gapes.

Hiccup scowls at him, attempting to summon Viking ferociousness to protect him, make him appear stronger than he actually is. "Now you're the one who looks like you saw a spider," he spits spitefully.

"Wait, back up," the spirit says, his voice weak, hysteria tugging at the edges of his breathtaking eyes. "You're like, looking at me, right? Not at the wall?"

"It's kind of hard to see it, with your fat head blocking it and all," Hiccup shoots back, slowly advancing, hand still on his dagger. He is less wary now. The spirit looks overwhelmed, as if he were given an unexpected gift that he had always wanted.

The spirit extends a slow, cautious hand, and brushes his fingers along the curve of Hiccup's cheekbones, his movements hesitant and stuttering. His fingers are as cold as winter's breath. Hiccup hardly dares move, even as the indignant growl bursting out of Toothless warns him that he should be making more of an attempt to defend himself than he is.

"You can see me," the spirit whispers, his eyes brighter than the sea under the high sun.

"Is this some kind of big thing?" Hiccup demands, but the commanding bite is driven from his tone by the way his voice trembles, sounding breathy and slightly unsure. The spirit frowns at him, thin lips turned downwards in disapproval.

"If everyone could see me, would I be making such a big deal about you being able to?" he asks drily, a smile tugging at the edges of his scowl.

Hiccup raises his eyebrows and feels a smirk of his own threatening to bloom. "I don't know; it could be how you spirits lure unsuspecting rescuers like me to our deaths," he snarks back.

"Most rescuers are idiots anyway," the other dismisses, with a wave of a long fingered hand. He is grinning now, an overwhelming ecstatic kind of grin that speaks of relief and loneliness and everything that Hiccup finds it painfully easy to understand. "I scared them off because the prince, well, he should be rescued by someone cool."

"And do I pass the test, oh your Bratiness?" Hiccup asks, with a ridiculously low bow. He can hear Toothless's confused mumble, as the conversation slips from threatening to friendly, almost flirty.

The spirit glances up and down, floats around him, ruffling Hiccup's thick auburn hair with one of those incredibly fragile hands. His hands are like winter, kissed by springtime — warm enough, with just the right amount of chilling bite. "You'll do," he decides.

"I'm delighted beyond words," Hiccup deadpans. The spirit smiles at him, light and carefree. His eyes are brighter than the summer sun on the fields of golden wheat.

"Well, come along, then," the spirit says, drifting towards the light still dancing from the heart of the mountain. "I'm Jack Frost," he calls over his shoulder as Hiccup starts off after him, Toothless reluctantly following with worried chirps directed at his boy's back. "And you are?" Jack turns to glance at him, still floating backwards, and Hiccup feels that rising dread that always threatens to suffocate him when he is forced to reveal his ridiculous name, especially to such a spirit with such achingly blue eyes.

But still he mumbles it, trying to swallow the sounds as they force their way past his lips. "I'm Hiccup Horrendous Haddock. The third."

Jack's smile never wavers, never drops an inch. "Pleased to meet you, Hiccup," he says kindly, and leads them further on.

Murals are splashed across the walls â€" blindingly beautiful things, full of delicately interwoven shapes rather than actual, recognizable figures. They are all done in blue tinged white, spiraling out and flowing into each other, so there is no end to their beauty.

"Why are you here?" Hiccup asks after a moment's pause. Jack's back stiffens slightly, his shoulders a sharp line against the soothing light. "Did you volunteer to guard the prince or something?"

"I don't know," Jack murmurs after a breath of silence, and his voice is full of aching pain. "I justâ€¦woke up here. I can't leave, can't really remember anything about myself."

"That's kind of shit," Hiccup says before he can stop himself. Jack's smile is wan and tired.

"Kind of, yeah," he agrees amicably enough, even though his voice is heavy. "We're almost there," he adds, gesturing down the corridor. The light is brighter, beautifully white and serene.

"I thought this would be harder," Hiccup comments, trying to quash the nerves roaring up within him. "Like, there's tons of tales of everyone who died doing this."

Jack snorts, and his grin stretches back across ice-white cheeks. "The tales of their deaths have been greatly exaggerated," he replies.

The corridor widens. The light incases them, swallows them whole. Hiccup feels at peace in a way he has not since he was very small and his mother was still alive, there to kiss his cheek and hold him close. The room is plain â€" the ice murals have not extended this far. The light glows from carvings in the ceiling, shimmering just like the face of the Man in the Moon.

Below the image lies a coffin, carved of shining, opaque ice, blue as the sky on a rainy day. Sigils carved into the side speak of protection, of healing, and a thousand other things that are beyond Hiccup's understanding.

He glances at Jack. Jack waves him towards the coffin. "It's not like he's going to bite you, skinny butt," he says, his words kind despite the teasing tone. Hiccup swallows the childish impulse to stick out his tongue and pads forward as silently as he can on suddenly leaden feet.

He is not sure what he expects to find, lying below the surface of the ice. But what he does find shocks him enough to rip the air from his lungs, suck the words from his mouth. The boy lying there has hair as white as snow, skin as pale as a cloud. He is tall and thin, and Hiccup knows his eyes are as blue as a frozen stream, or the ocean in summer.

"Jack," he manages, his voice strangled, "Why didn't you tell me that you're the prince?"

Silence reigns true for a moment, ringing in their ears.

"Oh fuck you, Hiccup," Jack says, as shaken as Hiccup is. "Stop messing around and save the jerk already. Maybe if he's gone, I can

leave."

"Jack," Hiccup insists, pointing down at the body lying before him, as if that will force his point across, "That's you. Like, right there. Butâ€¦dead. Ish. Fuck! You're the fucking prince?!"

"I don't know!" Jack shouts back, hysteria breaking through, his eyes as wide as the Moon himself. "I don't â€" I woke up here, a long time ago, and I can't leave and I don't know anything! I don't even know what I look like!"

"You don't?" Curiosity overwhelms the shock, and Hiccup manages to ask the question without screaming.

Jack glares at him, eyes as hard as icicles. "There's no mirrors here, and ice is hardly the most reflective thing out there," he snaps, crossing his arms across his bony chest. He floats defiantly off the floor, as if that will back up his point about why he cannot possibly be the prince, incased in a coffin of ice. "Look, just break him out, okay? If it is me â€" which it isn't, by the way - I guess I'll return to that body. And if not, then I'll be hopefully free to go."

Hiccup just sighs. "Fine," he mutters, turning back to the task at hand. "But how on earth am I suppose to wake him up?"

"How is it always done in fairy tales?" Jack shoots back, cocky mischief back on his face where it belongs. Hiccup can feel the blood racing to fill his pale skin, and ducks his head as if it will hide that from the other.

"But I'm a guy," he protests weakly.

"So? A lot of people are guys, and a lot of people are girls. Just kiss the dude and get it over with."

"There's ice in the way," Hiccup points out, laying his hand flat upon the surface, just over the colorless, pale lips.

And in the space of the breath Jack takes to reply, the ice begins to steam. Hiccup shrieks and tries to yank his hand away, only to find it bound as if by chains to the block. The ice runs off in rivers, flowing around the small island of dryness where Hiccup sits. Behind him, Toothless whines unhappily as the freezing water brushes against his sensitive scales. Within a moment, the prince is lying entirely free of the ice, resting upon a bed of the remains. Hiccup's hand is cupped over his jaw, where cool skin mingles with warm breath, tickling his skin.

"That was creepy," Jack comments from up by the ceiling. Hiccup mutely nods. "Just get it over with, kiddo. Come on."

This is what Hiccup has spent his entire life preparing for. This will make his name as a hero. This is what will win him the acceptance of his people and the adoration of a kingdom, the freedom to pursue his own dreams and goals.

But more than that, now, is it about freeing Jack of the blue, blue eyes and the lonely smile.

So Hiccup inhales.

He exhales.

The prince's lips are as soft as the first flowers in spring against Hiccup's own.

The room is silent. Hiccup sits back on his heels and studies the prince's face, the sharp line of his cheekbone, the angle of his jaw. The snow white air shifts in the gentle breeze blowing in from the mouth of the cave.

The eyes glimmer like the sky on a lazy summer day as they flicker open, bluer than blue and more valuable than anything the mountain that pierces the realm of the gods has to offer to Hiccup.

"Well shit," Prince Jack says, disoriented, lost, "I guess you were right after all."

Hiccup, barely able to repress his grin, punches him in the shoulder, and tugs him into a bone crushing hug.

* * *

><p>Once upon a time, a prince died saving his beloved sister.<p>

Once upon a time, the son of a mercenary, descendant of Vikings, grew up on stories about adventurers and heroes, and was sent out on his own epic quest to rescue the lost prince, saved by the Man in the Moon.

Once upon a time, a prince with mischief in his soul and a boy with more bravery than he knew he had flew away on a dragon into the sunrise.

And once upon a time, Hiccup saved Jack, and that was all that really mattered in the end.

* * *

><p>Author's Note

**For my starmate. Kind of quickly written and not really edited. Still. Enjoy, hopefully. **

End
file.